DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 146 659 CS 501 903

AUTHOR Bogusch, George E.
TITLE Theatre Research in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Program.
PUB DATE Aug 77
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Theatre Association (Chicago, Illinois, August 14-17, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Drama; Higher Education; *Humanism; *Humanistic Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Research; *Research Needs; *Theater Arts

ABSTRACT

This paper lists and discusses general research topics that have humanistic implications under Aristotle's six elements of drama, showing how the theatre arts use research from all disciplines and relate to all aspects of human endeavor. Specific research topics are also discussed, as are areas needing immediate exploration, such as aesthetic standards in all forms of theatre, emerging dramatic form, production criticism, and audience make-up, response, motivation, taste, and aesthetic appreciation. (RL)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

George E. Bogusch

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS."

ED146659

1977 ATA Annual Convention
By George E. Bogusch

THEATRE RESEARCH IN THE INTERDISCIPLINARY HUMANITIES PROGRAM

"How can research in theatre be incorporated into interdisciplinary humanities studies?" The question can easily be reversed: "How can any humanistic concern avoid being involved sooner or later in answering questions that relate to the theatre?" Or, to put it into a form I can expand upon: "What part of theatre doesn't involve, relate to, and/or reflect some part of the human existence?" In order to clarify this position, I believe that I must offer definitions of some of the key terms.

I am sure that "theatre" has been defined for, and by, each of you many times. It remains important, however, to keep a broad definition before us in this particular discussion. I define theatre as that art form that presents human agents enacting a dramatic imitation of life for a human audience. This definition includes dramatizations in the various media -- including many commercial messages -- structured sports events; elements of the circus; vaudeville and variety shows; as well as live theatre, opera and ballet. This definition is not totally inclusive. Depending upon interpretation, there are events performed for an audience by human agents -- live, in the media, on athletic fields and arenas -- that do not come under this global umbrella, but the majority do.

I believe that the working definition of theatre should be global in the humanistic context, since to limit it narrows our focus dangerously and can cause us to fail to consider aspects of our art that are both truly theatrical and which are relevant to an interdisciplinary humanities program.

The key part of the definition of theatre for us is the human enactment of a

CS501903

dramatic imitation -- an artifact or "making" created by man with beginning, middle, and end -- which is capable of affecting the emotions. As Aristotle pointed out, such will have, in some form, spectacle, rhythm and harmony, appropriate diction (which may or may not be voiced), thought or concepts, and ethical relationships fitted together into a gestalt -- plot -- greater than the sum of these parts. In short, it is a cumulated selection of elements designed to produce an emotional effect.

"Research", on the other hand, can be fairly simply defined. It is a methodical quest for answers to pertinent questions. Like any methodology it has basic and specific techniques. The basic techniques involve precise framing of the question to be answered, including establishment of the parameters and delimiters; definition of terms and concepts; development of a systematic investigative procedure, which involves locating, selecting, cataloging, validating, and ordering data; development of inferences, interpretations, and evaluations from the data; and appropriately reporting the process and findings. This procedure is foundational to each of the specific research applications and techniques, whether they be applied in the physical sciences, the social sciences, or the arts and humanities.

"Humanistic studies", as I understand the term, are an all-embracing discipline, which seeks to relate man's existence to his environment and to his endeavors. It is concerned with both process and product, principally as they cyclically affect man's existence. Therefore, for example, language, to the humanist, is both a tool in the communicative process and a cultural and/or artistic product.

Since theatre is an art form which employs all of man's processes and products in a synthesis of man's existence, investigation into the nature of theatre, into its products and processes, and into its artistic impact upon human existence -- its interaction with its audiences -- will necessarily relate to every aspect of man's endeavors, aspirations, and accomplishments.

It may be profitable, therefore, to spend a few minutes exploring some of the ramifications of theatre research as they relate to the variety of human concerns. At the risk of being derivative, I shall order this in the same manner that Aristotle dealt with the elements of tragedy.

Beginning with spectacle: Investigations which relate to the technology of theatre will involve both practical and theoretical applications of chemistry, physics, optics, mechanics, electronics, engineering, and drafting. The physical sciences, which, after all, are man's attempts to understand the order of the cosmos, are not the only research areas in the technological area of spectacle. Others include graphic and plastic art, architecture, aesthetics, and psychology. Spectacle can also include all sound, movement, and the physical presence of the human agents. Therefore, we can properly include investigations which involve the theoretical and practical applications of music, dance, fencing, gymnastics, acrobatics, circus training, juggling, accoustics, audiology, textiles, costume, social custom, cosmetics and make-up, fashion and style, physiology and fitness, and mass psychology. Whether the investigation proceeds from the perspective of the theatre, or whether it arises from some other source, the relationship to and from theatre can readily be established.

The second element, usually named "music" in translations of the Poetics, more inclusively concerns rhythm, harmony, and mood or tonality in the theatrical product. Research investigations in this area can be properly concerned not only with the formal study of all of the aspects of music itself, but with mode of presentation in the work as a whole; patterns of similarity or contrast in sound, in action and spectacle; patterns of mood, tone, and mode; patterns of words and language; prosody; linguistics; language arts; aesthetics; and ultimately every form of emotional analysis. Specific applications of aesthetic study; for example, those concerned with dance, music, the visual arts and theatre itself, are part of this general catalogue of research relations, not only in this area, but at all levels of this heirarchy of dramatic elements.

The third Aristotilean element is diction. Here investigations focus upon the choice and type of expression and the elements and forces that govern those choices. In many theatrical forms, diction is not verbal, so the fields subsumed in this area will include the languages of dance, of various sports, of music, as well as spoken language; other types of physical expression (ranging from body language to formal sign language); psychological and emotional expression; linguistics and language arts; mass and individual communication techniques; oral interpretation; poetics; and all questions of the style and manner of expression. In short, investigations into the manner, mode and aesthetics of communication relate to this area.

As the areas of investigation ascend the heirarchy, the concerns broaden and overlap. The topics related to and necessary for research in theatre at each successive level include and subsume the more specific applications and references in the preceding causal areas. As a result, when we reach the fourth Aristotilean

element -- thought -- it in itself subsumes all previously mentioned areas of study, since they are discrete portions of that element. Further areas of investigation at this level of theatre's interrelationship to humanistic study turn to expression of thought -- the content of expression. Hence, research problems relate to those of rhetoric, content analysis, philosophy and history of ideas, religious thought, scientific thought, aesthetic thought, politics, nationalism, idealism, and all the other specific genres of belief.

The fifth Aristotilean element is often translated as "character." Since that term is now limited by modern connotations, it seems wiser to return to the original word, ethos, and include the connotations of ethics and relationships. In this area investigations may focus on the various psychological tools for character analysis, as well as aspects of the application of ethical philosophy, cultural anthropology, heredity, sociology, demography, economics, environment, ecology, intercultural relations, social and physical motivation and behavior. These, in turn, lead to investigations into the relevance of each dramatic and theatrical concept to the society out of which it springs and which it consequently must reflect. This approach to dramatic works, especially those that reach, or have reached a portion of their society, is an invaluable analytic tool, both for the theatre and for the society. For example, as Rosemary Banks has demonstrated, using the most popular plays of the late 19th century American frontier, the domestic melodramas, it is possible to determine basic social values of the audience in the western mining camps.[1] A comparison of the values so derived for any society to those derived from other forms of contemporary popular art should be able to give the researcher, whether from the theatre or from the social sciences, a greater insight into the actual pulse and pressure of the culture.

Thus, as we consider the sixth Aristotilean element, plot -- the total synthesis or construct -- in this light, it is possible to see the world of specific research investigations into the relation of theatre and the humanities slowly culminating into a system of knowledge and understanding, not only of the potentialities and limitations of human existence, but of the great, slow currents which are its pressures and which give human life its form. It is this potential, yet only partially realized, which drives me to encourage members of other disciplines to investigate theatre research, and to encourage my undergraduate majors, frequently more venturesome than their graduate counterparts, into research explorations of the art in which they hope to find their careers. I encourage all of us to investigate more deeply the research reports of the humanistic disciplines with an eye to the relevance of their results to our field.

Up to now I have furnished only the most general catalogues of research potentials and involvements which relate theatre to the humanistic studies. I would like to conclude with some more specific ideas for research activities, some of which are being conducted by colleagues, friends and students, all of which nurture my enthusiasm for the diversity of theatre research.

Since drama and theatre deal with the emotions and with expressions of the individual as well as the mass, there have appeared the fields of drama therapy and developmental drama -- theatre which deals with and/or enforces emerging self concepts and individual development. These fields are themselves an expression of theatre's attempt to interact even more directly and responsively with its society. The use of theatre as a tool expressly designed to evoke specific emotions and awarenesses requires more precise research to explore its potentials

and limitations. Theatre's value in rehabilitative therapy for the emotionally disturbed and the physically handicapped is paralleled by the growing awareness of the value of theatre as a teaching tool in seemingly unlimited numbers of subject fields. At F.S.U. we have a doctoral student who has conducted experiments with improvisational acting training techniques as a rehabilitative tool for the negative mannerisms of the blind, and such experiments are being conducted at other institutions. We have graduate projects in theatre for the aged and retired, both as therapy and as occupation, studies also being conducted at a variety of institutions. In developmental drama, research teams made up of undergraduates and graduates have conducted several experiments with theatre in education -- theatre as a teaching tool -- in a variety of public school settings. One of our doctoral students has an empirical project to explore the effect of participational elements on attention and retention in child audiences; another study concerns the relevance of the child protagonist to the developmental theories of Piaget and others.

On the other hand, the question of aesthetic education and development, as well as more definite information on aesthetic standards, levels and taste in relation to all forms of theatre are urgently needed. These may take such pragmatic forms as solid market and consumer analysis -- a model project soon to be undertaken with our audiences -- as well as more theoretical explorations of emerging dramatic form and of production criticism, a field long undeveloped as contrasted to the criticism of dramatic literature.

Some areas need immediate exploration, however. Following up on the study, Financing the Performing Arts, conducted for the Ford Foundation,[2] systematic investigations need to be made of the mass, popular theatre in all its forms -- television, sports spectacles, dinner theatres, commercial tours, local theatre --

in relation to audience response, motivation and taste, and aesthetic appreciation; cultural development and social perception; and cross-over and transference. Some of the specific approaches to the questions may include investigations of repertory in relation to attendance, casting, and motivation of audience. Content analysis, a computor programmed investigation which has been used for such diverse lines of inquiry as ascription of authorship; analysis of attitude, taste and bias; and analysis of motivating factors could easily be applied to popular scripts to look for indicators of taste, of attitude, of mores of the society which makes up the audience. Demographic analysis of theatre patrons compared to comparable segments of the whole population can supply answers, both about the theatre and the society. The accumulation of these answers, which will be more than speculative, cannot help but enlighten us concerning all aspects of our society and its relationship to theatrical art.

Already historians are applying techniques such as these in order to determine the interaction of theatre and cultural taste, economic level, and political thought for specific periods and locales. Economic analyses of the theatre of 5th century Athens and 17th century London have been made and published.[3] Bevington and Mayer have produced trenchant analyses of the theatre in relationship to political and social thought in Tudor and 19th century England, respectively.[4] Joseph Donohue has contributed an analysis of theatre and cultural attitude and taste for the later 19th century, and David Grimsted has analyzed early 19th century American attitude and self image in relation to the popular theatre.[5] Preceding all of these, Richard Moody has explicated American theatre through an examination of the philosophy of Romanticism.[6] These and similar works indicate the considerable potential for humanistic theatre research, not only historically, but contem-

poraneously.

Other specific research questions center on the performers. For example, why are certain actors popular with segments of the audience? What cultural image or ideal do they represent? Are they simply objects of biological or psychological desire, or do they represent more general images and types? I believe that too often public taste, as represented by the popular performer, is dismissed on such superficial grounds as fad or sex-appeal, rather than employed as the basis for a solid investigation. What do the styles of appearance for performers -- costume, make-up, physical bearing and posture, physiology -- compared and contrasted to personality, charisma and characterization have to indicate to us about the values of the audience society?

The same kinds of questions can, and occasionally have been, asked about the physical milieus of our theatre. What does the architectural structure of our various theatres, their ambience and atmosphere, tell us about the society that patronizes them? How does the ornamentation, the mounting of the plays, the relationship of actor and audience space, the accoustical quality, invite or repel certain classes and groups of people? What is the relationship of audience to performer in the most popular theatre of all time -- American commercial television -- doing to audience attitude, theatrical taste and social behavior in other theatrical settings? What does it tell us of our society and its future development? Solid answers resulting from well-designed research investigations based upon humanistic perceptions are what all fields need now.

While all of these investigations, and many more that I have not mentioned, eventually need the most advanced and sophisticated research applications, they

can be profitably approached at any level, and indeed, must be explored in our classrooms now if we are to develop people who can effectively design the projects which will supply some of these answers. In my own experience, some of the most potent and exciting research activity has been undertaken successfully by individuals traditionally thought to be incapable or unsuited to such work -- general studies students taking theatre courses for humanities requirements, undergraduate majors with no previous research experience and training, and pre-professional B.F.A. and M.F.A. student artists.

For example, a few years ago, I had the good fortune to teach a research methods course to M.F.A. students. One design student with no previous research experience undertook a project in community history documentation to teach herself film technique. She advertised the project to the subject community and soon found herself innundated in historical documents and artifacts resulting, literally, in a room full of material. She devised an elaborate system of cataloging and reference, and created from the materials a short film that accurately and dynamically captured the spirit and the facts of the development of that social enclave. The film became an object of community pride and won for the student a grant to continue her studies.

In a more recent case, two undergraduate majors in my Cultural History of the American Theatre Course teamed and undertook a study of American popular social cliches. They examined popular periodicals of each period and compared them with the most frequently produced plays of the period. Eight weeks later they presented their findings in a public performance which juxtaposed attitudes, statements, ideas and behaviours in the 1970's to their counterparts in contemporary society. In a more polished production, the presentation would compare

favorably in both content and interest to anything currently seen on educational and public television. I know that the students who performed the research and made the presentation, and the people who witnessed it, learned more in that one session about the social development of the U.S. and emerged with a new understanding and respect of both the theatre and the cultures represented in this nation's history. This was one of two research projects that quarter that produced moving and provocative performances which expressed the progress and change of ideas as they are reflected in the theatre.

I do not think that these examples are necessarily pioneering or revolutionary attempts at valuable humanistic theatre research. Rather, I sincerely hope that these experiences actually lie within the van of such activities all through our field and in our institutions of learning and research. I hope that the awareness of the broad humanistic applications of theatre research at all levels is becoming foundational to all our educational endeavors. We are part of the world as it is and our art reflects all of the world and its ideas, both as it is and as it may become. We need to demonstrate and manifest our awareness of it at all times. In the process we will be able to demonstrate our responsibility to human life and our accountability for what we teach and believe so that we can continue to show the theatre's great value and relevance to human experience and endeavor.

NOTES

1. Rosemary Banks, "Melodrama As Social Document; Social Factors in the American Frontier Play," Theatre Studies 22 (1975-76), 42-49.

2. New York: The Ford Foundation, 1974.

3. See William J. Baumol, "Economics of Athenian Drama: Its Relevance for the Arts in a Small City Today," The Quarterly Journal of Economics 85 (August, 1971), 365-376; Mary I. Oates and William J. Baumol, "On the Economics of the Theatre in Renaissance London," Swedish Journal of Economics 74 (March, 1972), 136-160; Gordon Tullock, "On the Economics of Theatre in Renaissance London and Gay Nineties Eldora," and M.I. Oates and W.J. Baumol, "Reply to Gordon Tullock," both in Swedish Journal of Economics 76 (September, 1974), 366-368 and 369, respectively.

4. David Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics; A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968; and David Mayer, III, Harlequin in his Element; The English Pantomime, 1806-1836, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

5. Joseph Donohue, Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970; and David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled: American History and Culture, 1800-1850, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

6. Richard Moody, America Takes the Stage: Romanticism in American Drama and Theatre, 1750-1900, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955.